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SUBJECT: Special Media Reaction: Editorial Reaction to Ambassador's January 10 Speech to the American Chamber of Commerce on Peace Process

REFTELS: A) Colombo 2166 (2005) B) Colombo 0054 C) Colombo 0072

¶11. (U) Summary: English and Sinhala editorialists January 12 praised Ambassador Lunstead's January 10 speech to the American Chamber of Commerce in which he noted that peace should be the nation's highest priority, criticized recent LTTE violence and lauded the GOSL's restrained response to LTTE attacks. Some pro-LTTE Tamil media declined to editorialize; others reacted by reiterating Tamil nationalist grievances. State-run Rupavahini television aired Information Officer's reiteration of the main points of the speech on all evening English and vernacular broadcasts on January 11 and morning broadcasts January 12. End Summary.

¶12. (U) Government-owned media played up the statement the most: Bandula Jayasekara, newly appointed editor of the government-owned Daily News titled his January 12 editorial "Thank you, Mr. Ambassador." Jayasekara opined, "Thank you, Mr. Ambassador, for the bold stand which we hope would be emulated by all those actors and entities in the international system... As Ambassador Lunstead explained, the Lankan security forces have greatly enhanced their military skills as a result of cooperation extended them by the United States." State-owned television station Rupavahini carried footage of IO's two-minute reiteration of the Ambassador's message, with Sinhala and Tamil voice-overs on vernacular programs. Independent Asia Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) radio network also carried a similar sound-bite from PAO on all stations' news briefs.

¶13. (U) The Sinhala nationalist press, including the independent Island, shouted "three cheers and hats off" to Ambassador Lunstead in its editorial, arguing, "There is a limit to tolerance and patience, the U.S. seems to have said... Professional peaceniks... have a habit of branding anyone who criticizes the LTTE racist. Perhaps they will steer clear of [Mr. Lunstead] for fear of losing peace dollars... We hope that the other co-chairs and the worthy members of the international community will borrow a leaf from Mr. Lunstead's book and tell the LTTE to choose between abandoning violence or face dire consequences... We don't need Co-Chairs and monitors to act like spectators or commentators. They must play an active role in the peace making." Sister paper to the Island, the Sinhala daily Divaina, lauded "the refreshing American statement." The editorial contended the U.S. has set an example to the international community and boosted the morale of the Sri Lanka Army, but argued the U.S. had spoken too late, claiming with U.S. help Sri Lanka could have solved the terrorist problem long ago.

¶14. (U) The government-owned Daily New and the independent Island featured political cartoons depicting Ambassador Lunstead in their January 12 editorial sections. The Daily News pictured Uncle Sam shouting to a cowering tiger with a bomb tied to his tail, "I'm warning you." The Island pictures the U.S. Ambassador under a large-eared President George W. Bush mask stating, "Stop violent activities and return to peace talks."

¶15. (U) Pro-LTTE Sudar Oli carried a transcript of the speech without editorial comment. Pro-LTTE news website Nidarsanam, however, bannered "an open letter to the Ambassador" from an American professor, Aaron Rajah of San Francisco, who contended the American Government had overlooked the plight of the Tamils. Criticizing the purported difference in the U.S. response to the murder of a pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance Member of Parliament in December and that of Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar in August 2005, he argued, "In the recent brutal murder of democratically elected Tamil law maker, Mr. Joseph Parajasingham, on Christmas mass day in a Christian church, your silence in not condemning such a brutal attack on Tamil elected leaders only concreted the Tamil's despise of the

electoral process." Rajah also reiterated common allegations of LTTE sympathizers that the Sri Lankan Security Forces had recently raped and murdered several Tamil civilians and were complicit with paramilitary groups in the murder of LTTE cadres and prominent Tamils.

¶6. (U) Comment: Select English and Sinhala media offered exuberant praise of the Ambassador's speech, exaggerating U.S. assistance to the Sri Lankan military and goading the Tigers to heed this latest message. Sinhala nationalist media, as usual, also called for more active U.S. involvement in the peace process. Surprisingly, government-owned Tamil sister paper to the Daily News and Dinamina did not comment on the speech, nor did mainstream independent Tamil media. As expected, the pro-LTTE media ignored the Ambassador's line recognizing legitimate historical grievances of the Tamil people, preferring to rationalize the actions of the LTTE. (The full text of the speech may be found at <http://srilanka.usembassy.gov/>.) End Comment.

Lunstead